The Fulfilment *or* A Church at Work

BV
4400
D36
1902
GTU
Storage

ohn Gaylord Davenport, D.D.

To
Dr. Chamberlin
from his friend
Evans Edwards.

April. 1903.
Riverhead.

Class
Book
Accession No. 9961
PACIFIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
LIBRARY
Gift of Jas. G. Chamberlin

Exeunt - O.D.H.

THE FULFILMENT

OR

A CHURCH AT WORK

BY THE

REV. JOHN GAYLORD DAVENPORT, D.D.

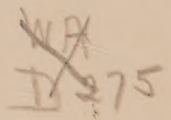
NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

31 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET

1902

BV
4400
D36
1902



Copyright, 1902
by
E. P. DUTTON & CO.

Published, April, 1902

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

THE FULFILMENT, OR A CHURCH AT WORK

THE Reverend Jonathan Mather, pastor of the Wayside Church in Edgewater, was becoming disheartened. For a long time he had been troubled with the feeling that his people were not showing the mutually helpful spirit that the Gospel inculcates. There seemed to be an almost impassable gulf between the families of his congregation that were well-to-do, and the larger number that were possessed of somewhat narrow resources. And in neither class was there any appreciable amount of the fellowship that is distinctively Christian. The church, as such, apparently affected

in but the slightest degree the social life of the parish. The pastor had spoken to his people of the matter both publicly and privately; had tried to induce certain of them who seemed amply fitted for the task to minister to certain others who were in special need of encouragement, consolation, or guidance, but thus far in vain. Two or three years before he had come from the seminary with a glowing idea of what the Gospel should accomplish in every community. In imagination he had seen a tide of Christian interest and affection flowing from home to home and from heart to heart, overleaping social distinctions, making little account of wealth or learning or descent or any of the matters that pertain to the external as contrasted with the vital and the eternal! And when he found that in Edgewater individual-

ism held sway, that the larger part of the people were living with the narrowest outlook, bound up in their own personal and family cares, with no thought or time for the interests of others and of the whole, his disappointment was so great that he fell into something of despondency. And this led him to a profound consideration of the situation and of his duty respecting it.

After prayerful thought upon the subject for several weeks, one beautiful Sunday morning in June he preached a sermon from the text, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." His heart was in the discourse, and as a result it throbbed with life. It was an earnest and touching exposition of the Christian law of love and of the demand it makes upon the follower of the Christ. He tried to

show that in becoming a Christian one surrenders himself to interest in and effort for others; that the service of Christ means the service of those for whom Christ died; that a church should be unified and vitalized by the strong mutual affection and helpfulness of its members.

The people listened to the burning words with close attention, some of them with a look of surprise upon their face as if a new doctrine were being announced rather than that which we had from the beginning. With considerable fervor they sang the hymn:

> How sweet, how heavenly, is the sight,
> When those who love the Lord,
> In one another's peace delight,
> And so fulfil His word.

Then, under the invoked benediction of the pastor, they passed thoughtfully

out into the summer sunshine. But few echoes of the sermon at that time came to the minister's ears. Good Deacon Somerset, indeed, lingered for a moment after the service, and said to him, "That 's pretty high doctrine, parson, pretty high! I don't b'lieve we can live up to it here in Edgewater. It 's about as much as we can do to look after ourselves, 'thout tryin' to look after other folks."

And Miss Minerva Sedgwick, an aristocratic maiden of some fifty winters, literary and wealthy and exclusive, came back and in quiet, cultured tones said: "Mr. Mahther, your theories are excellent, but they are not adapted to our age and locality. It is absolutely necessary here to maintain the old lines of separation between the 'clahss' and the 'mahss,' and even Christian fellowship

must not ignore them." The pastor smiled sadly as she spoke, but ventured no reply, and she moved in a dignified manner toward the porch, leaving upon the summer air the faintest suggestion of lavender.

Notwithstanding these slight rebuffs Mr. Mather felt that he had set forth the truth, and he determined that he would neither be content nor idle until he should see his church blossoming out into the exquisite beauty of a Christ-like spirit and a helpful affection, thoroughly divine because thoroughly human.

On Monday afternoon he set forth for a long walk across the fields, his objective point being the home of one of his parishioners living in the outskirts of the town, Mr. Abiah Colton, one of the most prosperous farmers of the re-

gion. His way for a time lay through a piece of woodland where he stopped to pluck anemones and sprays of the wild columbine. The cool, delightful air of the place soothed and invigorated him. The overarching trees seemed to him the roof of a gorgeous temple, and he felt that the Adorable was there.

Passing at length by the side of a cornfield, in which its owner was at work, he stopped for a talk, the "man with the hoe" leaning against the stone wall that rose between them.

"Parson," said Farmer Bligh, "I liked that sermon o' yourn yisteday mighty well. I could n't help thinkin' about it all the arternoon. An' as I thought, it seemed to me I 'd been selfisher 'n a pig all my life!

"Now there' s Jake Benson's widder lives right near me an' I had n't been in

to see her sence Jake died, comin' on ten or 'leven months, an' we both members o' the same church in good an' regular standin'. I knew she 'd had a hard time to git along with her four childern, but I never onct offered to help her. An' somehow yisteday arternoon it kind o' weighed on me. An' finally I said to my wife, says I, 'Betsey, what do ye say to goin' in an' seein' the Widder Benson a little while arter milkin' time?' She looked at me sort o' suprised like, fer I 'd told her she 'd better keep away from there or like 's not Jake's wife 'd be lookin' to us fer somethin' and we had all we could du to take car' of ourselves. But she said she 'd go and we went.

"I told her maybe Miss Benson 'd like a few o' the roses that 'd jest blowed out in our garden, an' I went an' picked

some for her myself. An' Betsey put a few sugar cookies in her pocket for the childern and we went over. And if you 'll b'lieve it we found Miss Benson settin' by the front winder a-cryin' jest like a baby! She said she 'd been thinkin' about Jake, how much he liked the summer-time, an' how they used to set out in the shade together Sunday arternoons and read and talk to the childern. An' she said she missed him so much, an' not a neighbor to speak tu nor a friend to come in, she thought her heart would break.

" An' she talked so kind o' feelin' and sad that we both had to take out our handkerchers an' blow our noses amazin.' An' I felt meaner 'n I had afore, meaner 'n pusley, meaner 'n pokeweed! An' I spoke up an' says I, ' Miss Benson, I knew your Jake an' I liked him fust-

rate; he was a real good sort o' feller. An' I 'm dreadful put out that I hain't been a better friend to his widder and childern. An' now,' says I, 'I want to help ye bear your burdens jest as fur 's I can, an' so try to fulfil that ar law o' Christ, fer I've been a church-member nigh on to twenty year, an' a mighty mean one tu!'

"An' we talked on awhile an' all got a-cryin', and finely says I, 'Le 's pray!' An' we knelt down an' I told the Lord what an' awful shif'less Christian I 'd been, an' as'ed Him to fergive me an' help me to keep His law better 'n I 'd ever done afore. An' I prayed fer Miss Benson an' her childern, an' you never see anybody brighten up as she had by the time we cum away! She said it seemed as if a new life had cum to her, an' she really b'lieved Jake knew about

it and thanked us fer comin'. And we told her to cum over to our house an' bring the childern an' we'd du everything we could fer 'em, an' that would n't be any more 'n that 'law' required.

"When Betsey an' I walked hum in the twilight, the world seemed sweeter an' the bugs happier with their songs than I 'd ever known 'em afore. An', by George, arter I went to bed I could n't git to sleep, I felt so kind o' joyful. An' I had to git up an' read that chapter in G'latians that you preached out of, afore I could shet my eyes! I lit a lamp an' read them very words, 'Bear ye one another's burdens, an' so fulfil the law o' Christ'; an' they seemed to shine out jest as if they was writ in gold.

"An' I said to my wife, says I, 'Betsey, what we been about all our life,

with them words a-standin' right there in the Testament, an' we goin' to church every Sunday, an' callin' ourselves good Christians, an' never techin' anybody's burdens with the tips o' our fingers?' An' we promised ourselves and the Lord, tu, that we 'd du better in the future.

"When I woke up this mornin' the' was a bright star in the east, an' as I looked at it I thought of them words in Revelations, 'I am the bright and mornin' star,' words ye know that the Lord said about Himself. An' it seemed as if it shone right into my heart, an' I was happier 'n I 'd been sence I could remember. I dunno what the cows thought when I went out to milk 'em, for 'nstead of scoldin' an' kickin' 'em, as I allers thought I must, I was a-singin' at the top o' my voice:

Happy the souls to Jesus j'ined,
An' saved by grace alone;
Walkin' in all His ways they find,
Their heaven on 'arth begun!

"I was a-comin' over to-night, parson, to tell ye all about it, and to say to ye that I wanted ye, arter this, to count on me when ye know of anybody's burdens that want liftin'."

All this of course was very surprising to the pastor, and his heart overflowed with gratitude and joy. Seizing the soiled and horny hand of his parishioner, while tears ran down his cheeks, he thanked him for his words, and felt himself nearer him in sympathy than he had as yet been able to come to any other of his church. Farmer Bligh went back to his hoeing and the pastor continued his journey, each with a new light in his eyes and a new gladness in his heart.

As Mr. Mather approached the Colton farmhouse he saw the daughter of the house, Miss Ruth, plying her needle beneath the great elms that pronounced continual benediction upon the homestead. Catching sight of the minister she ran to meet him, saying, "O Mr. Mather, I am so glad to see you! I wish to talk with you about your yesterday morning's sermon!" Ruth Colton was a fair maiden, and as she came up in her simple white attire, her cheeks flushed with the glow of health and of happy excitement, her visitor was very pleasantly impressed with her appearance.

Leading him to the rustic seat beneath the elms, she said to him in substance:

"That sermon of yours touched me deeply. It helped me to see the narrowness of my Christian life. In the

afternoon I went over to Mr. Lee's, and talked of the matter with Annie and Vincent. You know we are all members of the Endeavor Society ; in fact I have been its president for the last four months. We have been promising to do 'whatever Christ would like to have us do,' and yet we have scarcely made the slightest effort to cheer the neighborhood or to make any of its people better and happier. We all felt convicted of disloyalty to the Lord whom we have professed to serve. We were alone in the parlor and Annie suggested that we have a little Endeavor prayer-meeting, 'sentence prayers,' you know, all by ourselves, and make a new start. So we confessed our shortcomings and asked the Master to show us our duty and help us to do it.

"As we rose from our knees, Vincent

said, 'Come on! Let 's begin at once. There 's young Highler out on Kenmore Street, sick with consumption since — I don 't know when. Let 's go over and call upon him and maybe we can carry a little comfort into his wretched life.' So after an early tea we started. Annie and I took some flowers, and Vincent an orange or two, and carrying our Endeavor hymn-books along, we went to visit the young invalid. He was sitting in an easy chair, just inside the front door of his mother's home, where he could look out upon the beauty of the world and inhale the balmy atmosphere. We had all been schoolmates together, but Charlie Highler had been away for two or three years, and although we had heard of his illness and of his return, none of us had seen him. He seemed delighted to meet us and his hand clung

to ours long and lovingly. He told us briefly of his disappointment at the failure of his health, and said that although he had hoped to regain his strength and return to his business in the city, there was no present prospect of his being able to do so. And his dark eyes filled with tears as he spoke. His thin cheeks touched with a hectic flush told a sadder tale than did his words.

"Vincent, with a courage born of our newly formed purpose, told him that we ought to have visited him before, but that we had been so selfishly devoted to our own plans and pleasures that we had failed to do so. And then he spoke of your sermon, and of our resolve henceforth to do what we could to bear other people's burdens, that we might fulfil Christ's law of love.

"We asked if he would like to have us sing for him, and upon his joyfully assenting, we sang, 'Under His Wings,' 'I am the Shepherd True,' and two or three other pieces. Charlie seemed much affected. Tears kept trickling down his wasted cheeks. When we stopped he said, 'You know I have n't been a Christian, although I was brought up in church and Sunday-school. It never seemed to me that there was much in Christianity that anybody could get hold of. But if this is the spirit of your Christ that brings you here to-day to cheer and comfort me, I want Him for my Christ as well'; and he put his thin hand in Vincent's palm, and said, 'Number me, please, with you, and I will be loyal to your Master.'

"The soft summer air sweet with the breath of flowers came gently in; birds

were singing in the lilacs in the door-yard; the westering sun spoke of the warmth and splendor of the love divine, and heaven seemed very near. We sang,

God be with you till we meet again,

and came away with a new joy in our hearts. We agreed to speak to you of Charlie, thinking that you might like to call and talk with him about coming into the fellowship of the church."

All this was delightful news to the pastor, and he felt that the words that he had tried so hard to make impressive and inspiring had not been spoken in vain. Ruth added that she believed the sermon had presented the true idea of the Christian life, and that at the Endeavor meeting on Wednesday night, she, with Annie and Vincent, intended

to speak of it and to enlist the young people in something definite in the way of Christian work.

After a time the pastor went in and met the family at their evening meal, and started homeward just as the sun was going down behind the Neponset hills. He carried with him a very different spirit from that with which he had left his boarding-place a few hours before. The world had taken on new attractiveness, and the future seemed as brilliant as the sunset clouds.

The next Sunday morning the church was fuller than usual, and a peculiar solemnity seemed to be in the air. The pastor announced as his text the words from which he had spoken the week before. At that time he had laid down the principle involved in Paul's exhortaation, but now he spoke somewhat in

detail of the work that might be done in obeying it, of the various classes that were bearing burdens, and of approved methods of aiding them. In a delicate manner he alluded to what had been accomplished, during the week, in the manifestation of a truly Christian spirit. He spoke with evident emotion, and a responsive wave of feeling swept through the room.

Before pronouncing the benediction he asked all who were in sympathy with his suggestions, and who would be glad to be of service to others, to meet for a few moments in the lecture-room. The place was crowded, and the pastor asked Deacon Somerset to lead in a prayer for divine guidance. This he did in a child-like and touching manner, and as the bowed heads were lifted many eyes were seen to be moist with tears.

The pastor then briefly spoke of the matter that had engaged their attention, and said that he believed the text from which he had preached might be and ought to be the motto of their lives. And, in order to arrive at something definite, he suggested that all who were willing to do so agree to perform every day *at least one definite act of service* for some one else, using their best judgment, under divine direction, in determining the place and manner of bestowing their Christian aid.

Deacon Somerset said that it was "pretty high doctrin'" that the pastor was "preachin'," but he did n't know but what he 'd "be willin' to ventur' one good deed a day," in fact he 'd "like to try it."

Miss Sedgwick remarked that the principle was evidently an excellent one,

but that in carrying it out she thought every one should confine him or herself to his or her own circle; that in her opinion "clahsses" were of divine origin among men as well as among flowers and birds, and must not be disregarded.

Then Farmer Bligh rose and with tear-choked voice confessed his delinquencies in the past, and spoke of the new light that had shone upon his way. He said that, however Miss Sedgwick might feel, he was glad for one that the Master came not to help one class only but all classes. "'T would be pretty hard on us farmers," he said, "ef He 'd only thought o' the kid-gloved folks, an' them as kin live without workin'."

His words made a deep impression, and after he had taken his seat Vincent Lee rose and moved that they "form a society, to consist of all those who would

agree to do one intentional act of kindness, at least one act, every day." This was carried by a unanimous vote. The names of those willing to form themselves into the proposed organization were then taken, and it appeared that with scarcely an exception those present had assumed the obligation alluded to. Although, as Miss Sedgwick recorded her name, she whispered to the secretary, "I am to choose my own field, you know." "Certainly," was the reply, "we all are."

"What shall be the name of our society?" the pastor asked. One suggested, "The Burden Bearers," another "Helping Hands," and still another "The Law Fulfillers." The pastor said that a name, if the right one, might be a power, and as half the battle was in the assurance of victory already won,

he would suggest that it be called after the hint of their guiding text, "The Fulfilment." "We discuss and plan and promise," said he, "without limit. Now let us feel so certain of accomplishing something as to indicate this in our title." His words met with general approval, and the name he mentioned was adopted by a unanimous vote.

After a brief prayer of consecration to the work, and the singing of the verse,

> Blest be the tie that binds
> Our hearts in Christian love,

the people passed from the room, many grasping hands as they went, and expressing an interest in and a regard for each other that was entirely new to the Wayside Church in Edgewater.

It would be interesting to follow the course of each member of the society

that was thus born and christened, but evidently this is impossible. It will be enough to say that the amount of planning and endeavor and prayer on the part of those who had taken the pledge was very great. And the result was that there was not a poor person in the parish but that was helped in some judicious way; not a sick person that was not ministered to; not a bereaved family that did not receive tokens of sympathy, nor any one afflicted or tried in any manner to whom there did not come some evidence of thoughtful consideration and Christian affection.

Nor were external conditions alone considered. In the church were members for one reason or another disaffected, some of whom had not been seen in the prayer-meeting for years, and perhaps not at the Sunday service.

Toward these brotherly love went forth, and the burdens of dissatisfaction and disheartenment were eagerly and tenderly lifted.

All the benevolent organizations in the church started at once into new life. They afforded an evident opportunity through which to lift burdens from those oppressed. One lady said that if she were unable to go out upon any dark or stormy day, she could at least drop a quarter into her missionary box, with a prayer that the money might help some darkened one to the light.

Even the dumb beasts shared the benefits of the general good feeling. One farmer, after a great snowstorm, said that as he could n't reach any human being outside of his home, he was "goin to help his critters bear their

burdens." So he spent the day in improving the accommodations of his horses and cows, and in devising heating arrangements and a desirable *menu* for his poultry, and felt that he had been true to his pledge.

The spirit of helpfulness extended to the improvement of back roads over which some of the people must drive to church; to the planting of flowers and the decoration of dooryards; to everything that tended to make hearts lighter and lives happier. And so the village assumed a more attractive aspect. Of course some who had pledged grew weary and fell from the ranks, but the most became more and more interested in their endeavor and gave themselves to it with increasing intelligence and devotion.

The pastor in making a call one

winter day upon a colored family that lived at a distance from the centre, was surprised to find Miss Minerva Sedgwick there, holding the black baby to her maidenly heart and trying to soothe it that it might not disturb its suffering mother. Her love for Christ and humanity had overcome her fastidiousness, and she was eager to bear any burden that presented itself.

Naturally the additions to the church were many. A religion that showed itself so helpful could but be esteemed, and all desired to learn life's great lesson of the almighty Burden-Bearer. The parish was vitalized as never before. A feeling akin to that of family affection pervaded it. The services on Sunday and on week-day were thronged, and, while there was peculiar tenderness shown toward each other by those who

came together, all the warmth of heart seemed to gravitate toward the great Friend and Redeemer of all.

Just a year had passed since the June day on which the pastor had threaded the woods on his way to the Colton farmhouse. He kept the anniversary by taking the same path that he had that day chosen. As then, the woods were cool, and their breath refreshing. He stopped in the shade, and, throwing himself upon the moss, thought it all over, and said to himself, "What hath God wrought!" He himself was a different man from that he had been a year before, having a clearer understanding of Christ and of His religion and a far warmer heart toward all humanity. And as he lay there under the whispering oaks, he perceived what it is that is to uplift the race; it is simply

the Christ, showing Himself in the hearts and lives of His followers. And he resolved to carry the principle of "The Fulfilment" to still wider applications, believing it capable of being applied in all the relations in which human beings stand to each other, whether domestic, social, educational, political, national, or international. "Bear ye one another's burdens." It was simply the summons to display the Master's own spirit amid all the complicated affairs of the community and of the world. And he prayed for wisdom and guidance, for enlarged views and an enlarged heart, that he might do all the will divine.

Continuing his walk, he reached the Colton mansion and found Miss Ruth, as a year before, sitting with her sewing upon a rustic seat beneath the elms.

Dropping down beside her he talked of the year and its successes. Then he thanked her for the great aid which she had rendered in the work, especially through the strong influence she had brought to bear upon the young people of the parish.

"And Ruth," said he, "I am personally your debtor, for you have borne my burdens this year as no one else has ever done, uplifting my heart and bringing a new and delightful impulse into my life. You are the 'Fulfilment' of my desire and hope. Will you share my burdens and permit me to share yours all our life long?"

She admitted the suddenness of his appeal, and at the same time declared that she could not consistently reject it. And when the daisies of June had given place to the golden-rod and purple

asters of late September, there was a wedding in the Wayside Church, attended by nearly all the parish. The members of the year-old society had written in flowers along the arch above the pulpit the verse, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And back of the pulpit, also in flowers, appeared these words, "Love is the fulfilment of the Law."

After the ceremony, which was performed by a college classmate of the pastor, a choir of young people sang a hymn written for the occasion by Miss Sedgwick.

And then the flowers of the arch were taken down and distributed among the people; each accepting a blossom as a fresh adoption of the inspired motto, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500
All items are subject to recall.

GTU Library
3 2400 00457 7965